

The Reversal of Death

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[0 : 0 0] We turn now to our reading and we're back to Luke's Gospel and to chapter 7. And we're going to read together Luke 7, 1 to 35, which begins a new section.

You remember we saw chapters 5 and 6 were very much a unit. And you'll see also that chapters 7 and 8 are also a unit before a new start begins at chapter 9 when Jesus calls his apostles and sends them out in his name.

But here we have two chapters which are summed up really by chapter 8, verse 1. Jesus going through the cities and the villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

That's what these two chapters are all about. But Jesus proclaiming and demonstrating the good news of his kingdom and teaching us exactly what that does and doesn't mean.

And so we're going to look at verses 1 to 35 of chapter 7 this morning. After he'd finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

[1 : 1 5] Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and save his servant.

And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue. And Jesus went with them.

When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you.

But say the word and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority with soldiers under me. I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him. And turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.

[2 : 2 1] And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

And he drew near to the gate of the town. Behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother. And she was a widow. And a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, do not weep. Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.

And he said, young man, I say to you, arise. And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother.

Fear seized them all. And they glorified God, saying, a great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people. And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

- [3 : 23] The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, are you the one who is to come?
- Or shall we look for another? And when the men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, are you the one who is to come? Or shall we look for another? In that hour, Jesus healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits.
- And on many who were blind, he bestowed sight. And he answered them, go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear.
- The dead are raised up. And the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended, who doesn't stumble because of me.
- When John's messages had gone, Jesus began to speak to all the crowds concerning John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see?
- [4 : 27] A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet?
- Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it was written. Behold, I sent my messenger before your face who will prepare your way before you.
- I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John. And yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.
- When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just. Having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.
- To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They're like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, We played the flute for you and you didn't dance.
- [5 : 31] We sang a dirge and you didn't weep. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say he is a demon. The son of man has come eating and drinking.
- And you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified, is proved true by all her children.
- Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Amen. Well, do turn, if you would, to Luke chapter 7.
- There are many troubling perplexities in life and in the life of faith. And many things, therefore, can cause people to doubt and even to drift into disbelief about the Savior, Jesus Christ.
- Very often the root cause of such feelings are wrong and inadequate expectations about what salvation through Jesus really is all about.
- [6 : 41] Sometimes somebody becomes a Christian from a background of a great struggle with a particular sin. And in the first flush of faith, they find that these temptations that plague them now seem suddenly dead.
- And it's wonderful. But alas, over time, it turns out not to be so. And those struggles haven't gone forever.
- And they discover that they still have slip-ups and falls. And that can be very dispiriting, can't it? Or sometimes it's a personal illness or hardship that they've prayed very, very earnestly for God to take away.

Or perhaps it's that of a loved one. And that doesn't happen. And that's very disappointing. And it can shake people's faith. Sometimes it's their own arena of ministry and service of Christ is rocked by terrible disappointment, terrible conflict.

And that can shake somebody's faith in God very considerably. And these things and many others can be very, very hard to deal with. But if we have inadequate expectations about what the salvation of God is really about and therefore what the life of faith in Jesus is really going to be like, then it can be very, very difficult and quite disastrous.

[8 : 02] Paradoxically, often we don't have nearly a big enough view of how vast and great the salvation that Christ brings us really is. And so we settle for something much less than his good news really proclaims.

And yet at the same time, that rather makes us expect more, perhaps, in this life than Jesus ever promises to us. Well, Luke chapters 7 and 8 are here to teach us about the true magnitude of the wonders of Christ's salvation.

Wonders which caused amazement when Jesus proclaimed the good news himself and demonstrated his message all around Palestine. But these chapters also teach us a very great deal about the priorities and the program for his kingdom as it's unveiled to the world by Jesus himself.

And we need to understand that if we are not to fall into doubts and disappointments too, even as John the Baptist did. As he languished in prison.

Now these chapters focus on proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. That's how Jesus himself describes his earthly ministry there in verse 22. The poor have good news preached to them.

[9 : 20] And again, as I said in chapter 8, verse 1, he affirms that what all these events are describing are Jesus proclaiming and bringing the good news of his kingdom.

And that is what Jesus is saying his ministry priority is. Remember back in chapter 4, verse 43, he said it very plainly, I must preach the good news of the kingdom widely.

That's why I came. And all through these chapters, we see just exactly what that means for Jesus. And what it means is Jesus bringing individual people to experience his salvation.

We see him saving a whole variety of different people in different situations. And that verb, to save, is so very prominent through these chapters. You see it in chapter 7, verse 3, when the centurion asked him to come and save his servant.

It could be translated, come and heal my servant. Chapter 7, verse 50, Jesus says to the woman, your faith has saved you. Chapter 8, verse 12, when he tells the parable of the sword, it's the seed of the word that saves people.

[10 : 32] And in chapter 8, verse 36 and 48 and 50, the words that are translated in our Bibles, healed or made you well, could just as well, perhaps better be translated, saved you.

Remember what Jesus has said in the synagogue back in chapter 4, when he quotes from Isaiah and says, the year of the Lord's favor has begun. And he stopped, didn't he, in that quote, mid-sentence, before Isaiah the prophet went on and said, and the day of vengeance of our God.

And that's why Jesus' message is good news. Because he comes, yes, as a king, to assert his authority in his kingdom. But he comes first to offer salvation in a time of favor, before the final day that he will come to judge all the earth and to set to rights everything in this world forever.

And so the year of the Lord's favor has begun now with Jesus coming. And now is the day of salvation, when the wonders of his grace are made available to people now, even before all things are made new, before all evil is finally destroyed, and before all his enemies are put to shame.

And these two chapters give us multiple demonstrations, which picture for us just what the wonders of God's salvation means for the lives of individual men and women now in the day of God's favor, when the poor receive the wonderful good news.

[12 : 07] And it's clear, of course, when we read these chapters, that Jesus doesn't just mean the economically poor, because the range of people he touches with his mercy here include all kinds of people, from a very wealthy centurion that we see in the first story, as well as the destitute widow in the second.

But what we see is wonderful pictures of salvation, with all the multifaceted joys and blessings that salvation really brings. And as he brings it to people of every background and of every race, we'll see that it means release from debt.

That's pictured so wonderfully in the story of the sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet. She is released from sin's past into the service of the Savior. It means rescue from darkness, rescue from sin's power.

We see that in the hostility of nature that is subdued, and indeed in the personal presence of evil, in the legion of demons that are cast out. Salvation means the removal of sin's despair, the removal of its pain and poverty that so blighted the life of the woman with the issue of blood, and so caused so much pain to Jairus and his family.

But above all, we see that salvation means the reversal of death itself. Bracketing the whole section of stories where we see Jesus reversing the ultimate penalty of sin, that is, death, the ultimate consequence of man's sin before a holy God.

[13 : 39] Not only, of course, death of our mortal bodies, but death as the separation of our being from the life of God himself forever. And Luke is saying to us that this, and nothing less than this, is the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming and bringing and demonstrating in the lives of real men and women.

And by recording these stories for us as he does, Luke wants us, as his readers, he wants us to have certainty. That's why he writes, isn't it? Certainty about what salvation in Jesus really does mean, so that we do not allow doubts and disappointments to arise when our experience of life could tend to lead us into despair and even into disbelief about our Savior.

Jesus has come not just to make our human lives a little bit better, not just to make things a little bit better in this world, but he comes to bring us new life in a holy new world, everlasting life, in a glorious new universe that his kingdom will bring, even though that is not yet fully revealed and complete.

But the day of that salvation has begun. And the message of our passage today is that whatever things we might not yet still see and that we long to see, that Jesus has already proclaimed the reversal of human beings' ultimate problem, the reversal of death.

Because in his gospel, the penalty of sin has been reversed forever. For the wages of sin is death, says Paul in Romans 6, verse 23.

[15 : 25] But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And that is what was portrayed for us so graphically in the first two of these stories, in verses 1 to 17 of chapter 7.

And very particularly, the focus in these stories is on how this eternal life can become the possession, the certain possession of individual men and women through Jesus.

And Luke shows us that it comes as a gift through God's sheer grace and that it comes to us through faith and through personal trust in the Savior Jesus Christ. Let's try and summarize Luke's message then under four headings.

First of all, in verses 1 to 17, we have a graphic demonstration. A graphic demonstration of salvation in Jesus. We see salvation pictured so clearly as the reversal of sin's ultimate penalty, the reversal of death and the release into fullness of life.

First, for the centurion's servant who, verse 2 says, was at the point of death. And then, for the widow's son who had already died and was about to be buried. Two very similar miraculous works observed by crowds, testified, supernatural power, no doubt about that.

[16 : 43] That's why we read in verse 16, by the way, that the people were filled with fear and awe. These were not credulous primitive fools. These are not people who expected people to rise from the dead every day of the week.

That's the whole point of the story. That's why they were amazed. They did not expect it. They'd never seen anything like this. They knew from reading the Bibles, of course, that long, long ago, some of the great prophets, Elijah and Elisha, yes, they had indeed raised a widow's son to life.

But nothing like this had been heard over for centuries. Certainly not in their experience. That's why they say in verse 16, a great prophet has arisen among us. God has surely intervened in our very lives.

In other words, they saw that these happenings were a sign that something extraordinary was invading their lives and the world, that it was a visitation of God himself.

So they understood something, at least, of the significance of these events that were more than just the events themselves. And that is certainly what Luke wants us to see.

[17 : 55] If death, which is man's ultimate problem, is being reversed by Jesus, then it must mean that this is a sign that the cause of death is being dealt with by Jesus himself.

And that is the good news that Jesus was proclaiming and bringing. That he's demonstrating both the wonder of the ultimate good news and how that ultimate blessing of salvation touches the lives of individual, ordinary, real people.

And if you look, that is where the focus of Luke's telling of these stories lies in each episode. Look at the first one. In the first story, all the focus is not on the servant who was healed, is it?

We're told he was at death's door, verse 2, and then we're told in verse 10 that at the end he was well. That's all we're told about him. But we are told a great deal, are we not, about the centurion.

And the whole story climaxes in verse 9, do you see, with Jesus' pronouncement about him. Not even in Israel have I found such faith. It's all about the faith of this man in the person of Jesus.

[19 : 03] This man, by the way, he was not an Israelite but a Gentile, a wealthy centurion, but as far as saving this precious servant, he was utterly poor and helpless. But he's a caring man, he values his servant, and he's heard about Jesus.

So he says to his friends among the Jewish elders, verse 3, to go and ask him to come and save my servant from death. He must have been an unusual man, mustn't he, for the Jews to have such a high opinion of a soldier in the occupying army.

Perhaps he was a proselyte, a God-fearer, somebody who was seeking the truth from the Jewish scriptures. Certainly he honored Israel, he built them a synagogue, he was a generous man. And the Jews say to Jesus, do you see, verse 4, he is worthy, he deserves your help, Jesus.

They think he's worthy because of his religious works and because of his giving and because he had sided with them and their pedigree as Jews. They show a very typically religious mindset, don't they?

But look what he says in verse 6, I am not worthy. He's not a proud man. He doesn't think that Jesus owes him one in return for all his good works.

[20 : 16] He doesn't base his request on anything that he has done or deserved, but rather on who Jesus is and the authority that he clearly sees in him bestowed from a far higher power than any on earth.

He tells Jesus he knows his own authority comes from above, from the emperor. That's why he can command people. And clearly he sees Jesus comes with a far, far higher authority than that.

And so humbly he seeks his help because he knows that this man and only this man can meet his need and save his servant. And so he just says to him, say the word and let my servant be healed.

And Jesus says to everybody, that is the meaning of faith. He is a Gentile, but he's a man seeking the truth.

A man of real faith that's proved to be real by his works of mercy and love. He's somebody who according to Jesus hears the word of God and does it. And so when he is confronted by Jesus, he recognizes his authority and his power and he throws himself at his mercy and he receives great blessing at Jesus' hands.

[21 : 33] The Jews said of him, he has great merit. But both the centurion and Jesus are absolutely clear. It is not at all about his merit or worthiness. It is because, says Jesus, he has great faith.

Faith in the person of Jesus. And indeed, faith in the word of Jesus to save. Notice that for the centurion, Christ's word is every bit as good as his presence. Just say the word, verse 7.

What a vital message for Luke's friend Theophilus and all Luke's other readers who don't have Jesus' personal presence but do have Jesus' word in his gospel.

That we too can be certain like the centurion that the gospel word of good news carried by God's servants will bring salvation to those who are helpless in the grip of sin's penalty.

You think Luke could possibly be clearer here? Salvation from death, from the ultimate penalty of sin comes not through any man's worthiness or his works but by faith in the word of Jesus Christ the Savior.

[22 : 43] Well what about the next story in verses 11 to 17 which by the way only Luke records of all the gospel writers so why does he record it and why does he put it right here in his carefully ordered account?

Well again look where the focus of the whole story lies. Look where Luke's camera lens homes in. Again it's all on how this wonderful miraculous blessing comes to those who receive it from the Savior.

Notice again the raised son is not center stage. The focus is all upon his mother. Verse 12 he was the only son of his mother a widow.

So right away we see somebody utterly helpless the centurion was wealthy and he humbled himself in coming to Jesus but here's a woman who's already utterly humbled she has no husband and now she has no son to look after her.

She would in that world be destitute. And Jesus says to her verse 13 he had compassion on her and he said do not weep. She doesn't approach him she doesn't ask him for anything.

[23 : 57] What on earth could she expect him to do? Things were far far too far gone for that. But uninitiated and unilaterally Jesus intervenes and he touches the burial party and they all stand still to be absolutely shocked at him making himself unclean by contact with a dead body.

But death was about to be banished again at his word of good news. Arise says Jesus and he did and the man spoke.

But look at verse 15 that wonderful pregnant phrase and Jesus gave him to his mother a gift of salvation sovereignly and suddenly and freely and personally given by Jesus himself at his word of power a word that proclaims and brings the good news of the kingdom of God into the lives and into the experiences of real living individual human beings.

Could there possibly be a more graphic illustration of salvation that is by the sheer sovereign grace and mercy of God in the personal intervention of Jesus Christ the son of God?

Could there be? So Luke says look at these two stories together and do you see what Jesus came to do to bring salvation from man's greatest need to reverse the penalty of sin that leads to death as the wages of sin and to bring resurrection to everlasting life by the sovereign gift of God's grace which is offered to all not on the basis of any works or merit but through faith through personal trust in the savior himself.

[25 : 55] I was wondering as I was reading this whether Luke and Paul when they travel together on their missionary journeys as we read of in Acts whether they would sit and speak about their stories and influence one another in their writing.

I don't know but what is clear is that what Paul wrote to the Ephesian church in Ephesians chapter 2 certainly sums up Luke's clear message here which is exactly what Jesus himself was demonstrating in his ministry of the gospel through all these cities and towns.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians you were dead in your trespasses and sins but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ and raised us up with him for by grace you have been saved through faith that is not of your doing it is the gift of God great grace he had compassion on her he said do not weep and Jesus gave him to his mother and great faith I am not worthy but just say the word and let my servant be healed you see in his words and in his works Jesus is demonstrating what his salvation really is it is the ultimate answer to mankind's need and he's showing us how it's to be found by faith in him as the giver of that wonderful gift of grace freely and sovereignly and chapter 8 verse 1 tells us that's what he was doing everywhere proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God but the question is of course what do people make of this good news so graphically demonstrated before them well verses 16 and 17 tell us that they understood something miraculous and supernatural was going on an intervention of God and that is the news that spread we're told through all the countryside but it wasn't immediately clear to everyone exactly what that meant just as it's not always clear today to people exactly how what Jesus promised as the blessing of his kingdom fits with the world as it still seems to be the world as we know it to be because physical death hasn't yet disappeared from this world has it or illness or tragedy or evil or all the other things that surely don't belong in the kingdom of

God on earth and don't belong in the vision of what the prophets of old had promised so you see the next verses show us that all of this was a problem even for someone like John the Baptist verses 18 to 23 show us the message of Jesus being met with genuine doubts genuine doubts about this salvation as proclaimed in Jesus all Jesus ministry was reported to John says verse 18 but clearly he had doubts and he sent followers to ask well are you really the one who who's to come are you the one that I proclaimed in my ministry or should we be looking for someone else some of the scholars when you read them are very quick to berate John for his lack of faith on the other hand there's others who say well he didn't really doubt at all he was just saying this for the sake of his followers but now what Luke is saying is genuine doubt the honest perplexity of a man who's languishing in prison as the result of his ministry who's suffering because of his faithfulness to God and he has every reason surely to be cast down and to doubt wouldn't you be saying to yourself

I wonder if I got it all wrong I thought God's message that he gave me to proclaim was that his Messiah was coming to put everything right to pave the way for his kingdom of righteousness and peace but here I am in prison Herod is still in charge the Romans are still in charge and the world is just the same maybe I was deluded wouldn't you be saying to yourself I'm hearing all about Jesus I'm hearing all about his mighty work healing the sick raising the dead why hasn't he rescued me what about that bit about liberty for the captives but I'm still in prison where was the promised day of the Lord judging all men punishing all evil restoring all things banishing all sickness and all injustice and all suffering vindicating all the faithful ones of God rewarding those who had stood for God and been faithful to God despite much opposition those are real questions aren't they the real question still today for many people if what

[30 : 59] Jesus said is really real and salvation is everything he promised the death of death and life in all its fullness well why wasn't my beloved and only child saved from death why wasn't my husband saved when he got cancer in his forties why has my life been so scarred by my background so that even though I've come to Christ and I'm a believer I'm still screwed up and I still have so many struggles and difficulties because of my past why and if Jesus is really king why isn't he putting the whole world to rights now why is evil still so rampant in the world why is there still so much persecution and suffering from those who are faithful to Jesus and who are so mistreated for their faith don't you think the loved ones of that young couple in Pakistan who were burned to death in their own bread oven are asking questions like that today we want to trust you

Jesus but there's so much to perplex us there's so much that we find hard to understand please can you tell us something to reassure us that we're not totally wrong in following you that we have believed the right thing that's what John's saying these are genuine doubts they're agonized cries of faith that is seeking understanding that's seeking reassurance because it seems to our sight and experience not to be as we think it ought to be if Jesus gospel is really true well I think if you've never felt like that at times mid disappointments and heartaches in your life I'd be very surprised look at how Jesus responds to John he gives him a reassurance that he can trust every word that God has promised in scripture and that has been fulfilled in him verse 21 you see in that very hour he demonstrates before his disciples again the wonders of his kingdom and in verse 22 he says again in effect go and tell

John everything you've seen all the words of scripture that have been fulfilled in abundance in my ministry everything that Isaiah had promised he's quoting here directly from Isaiah 29 and Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61 the blind see the lame walk the dead are raised and above all the good news is being proclaimed to the poor see John doesn't Jesus doesn't deny that all the rest of John's expectations are going to be fulfilled they certainly will be fulfilled when he comes to judge the world in righteousness forever but he points John to what he has done already and he says to him look at all this my kingdom has begun and that is enough for you to believe that everything else that I have said I will do I will do in my good time according to my perfect plan and timetable not yours so you mustn't be offended verse 23 you mustn't stumble over me bringing in my kingdom my way not your way don't stumble

John because my priorities are not your priorities that's such a problem for us isn't it because our priorities so often are different from God's priorities for his kingdom we would like him to make his priorities our immediate salvation in terms of rescue from all of our discomfort and illness and physical healing and peace and justice throughout the world and the end of evil the end of poverty and all of these things that's what we would like in fact many today would say well that must be the priority of the church we're to build Christ's kingdom in the world that way we're to bless the world materially we're to give ourselves constantly to action for the poor and so on above all else but what is Jesus priority for the poor verse 22 that they have the good news proclaimed to them you see his priority is constantly that

I must preach the good news of the kingdom to others also and that's what these chapters are full of Jesus proclaiming and bringing the good news of God to hosts of individual people men and women so as to bring them salvation by the removal of the penalty of their sins which is their greatest need above all other needs even though they don't realize it to grant them pardon that will lead to eternal life beyond the great day of judgment which surely will come when God judges the earth and there is no greater priority for Jesus than that one and Jesus is saying to John John that's what I'm doing now you proclaim the coming judgment you proclaim the need to repent and I have come to proclaim and indeed to extend the year of the Lord's favor to proclaim the year of jubilee the year of blessing of real forgiveness so that people can have forgiveness and salvation now before that day of judgment comes that you promised so rightly and that's why the restoration of all things has to wait a while

[36 : 49] John so that my grace and forgiveness can be proclaimed abroad as the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth to all kinds of people just what Peter says isn't it in 2 Peter 3 the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness but he is patient not wanting any to perish but all to reach repentance but the day of the Lord will come see how gentle Jesus is with people when their doubts are genuine when it's honest perplexity he doesn't answer all of our questions and there are many things that will remain a mystery and we'll be perplexed by and struggle with but these things are never really barriers to real faith because we know enough to trust Jesus to know that he'll never let us down and we need to look and see all the things that he has done in our lives and in the lives of countless others all the things that have been fulfilled just as the scriptures have promised us and then we will know won't we that we can trust him with all the things that still we don't wick he reassures

John look how gentle and generous he is with him even at his lowest point in despair in prison Jesus is saying of him this is the greatest man who's ever been a prophet indeed the greatest man who's ever lived it's just worth noting isn't it how different Jesus is so often with fragile people from the way that we often are John's theology wasn't perfect there was he didn't yet have a grip of but Jesus did not write him off for that he honored him and the fruit of John's ministry is very plain in verse 29 when many find salvation and rejoiced in God through him what a comfort to all of us that should be with our doubts and fears and mistakes but if Jesus meets honest doubts with further revelation and reassurance it's not so when the response to him is one of hardened disbelief that he does meet with rebuke and with sad rejection and for the most part that is the sad story of those that

Jesus addresses in verses 24 to 35 after John's disciples have left the attitude he confronts here is that of grumbling disdain towards the message of salvation in Jesus he recalls John's ministry and he turns to the crowds and says to them effectively what about you what did you go out to see in the desert note he repeats the you he's challenging all of them you didn't go out and see a soft man in a palace like Herod whose nickname apparently was the swaying greed he bent in whatever direction he had to for political gain no you went to see the greatest prophet who ever lived who preached a straight unchanging message of repentance who prepared the way and announced the news that the Messiah himself would now come and bring a kingdom so great so much more glorious than anything that anyone has ever known that even the least citizen in that kingdom surpasses even the greatest in the old he says because at last they have got peace with

God because sin's penalty has been removed forever for everyone who believes John had been proclaiming the coming of somebody wonderful and now Jesus was confirming it all but what once the crowds had flocked out to see and hear well it seems they now just turned away from and rejected and forgotten all about now they treated Jesus with the same disdain why not here because of honest perplexity as to why Jesus program was different from their expectation not doubts that were honest seeking explanation and reassurance but rather hardened perversity from hearts full of unbelief because Jesus says they did not want a way of salvation that wouldn't give them what they wanted their way they didn't want a savior who wouldn't dance to their tune and so the gospel offended them it was a stumbling block to them they stumbled over the real

Jesus and the real gospel and that was so so sadly for the majority of Israel that's what Paul says in Romans 9 32 but it's still true isn't it over so much of the world today when the real gospel of the real Jesus confronts people it isn't what we want to hear and so we grumble we find issues with it it's like grumpy children verse 32 who don't get their own way we wanted to play at weddings and cry we hate you when people don't want to be faced with the real truth about God revealed in Jesus they'll find any reason won't they to discard it and discredit it that John the Baptist verse 33 we don't like him he's got a demon they wrote off his solemn message of repentance as just fire and brimstone oh that doer Scottish Galvanism oh not having that but when

[42 : 33] Jesus emphasized alongside that the joy and the grace of the good news they wrote him off as frivolous and lightweight oh a glutton and a drunkard one of those happy clappy fundamentalists that's what happens isn't it when the heart of the matter is that you do not want to accept and submit to the demands and the challenges on your life of the real Jesus Christ you'll find fault with whatever way it's proclaimed and whoever proclaims it oh I don't like that preaching it's far too heavy it's far too long oh I can't stand him he's far too flippant far too many jokes far too lightweight you'll dislike the speaker you'll dislike the songs you'll dislike the welcome at the door oh people are in your face you can't get away from them oh they're terribly unfriendly they'll never speak to you you'll always find something it's just never right it's just never to your taste there's always something wrong that allows you to dismiss the message and the real challenge to your life and in just that way the most privileged generation in history verse 31 they fended off and persistently refused the real gospel of

Jesus they oppose John's call to repentance and they oppose Jesus call to rejoice with just the same hostility strange isn't it how the human heart opposes naturally both of these emphases of the true gospel those people hate a message of sin that has to include them and we have to repent and we hate a message of grace that includes others because we don't like others who we feel are far less worthy and good than us we don't want them to have the same reception from God as we do it's a great dent to our own self esteem and pride the human heart wants a message that affirms us and our attitudes and our way of life and does not challenge it and if it can also have a message that criticizes other peoples and boosts our self esteem at the same time then so much the better isn't that right because we want a savior who will dance to our tune and so if the real Jesus starts to insist that it's he who calls the tune that it's he who decides the priority of his kingdom and he who demands that we live according to his direction well we so easily become offended by him he becomes a stumbling block we oppose him it may be we can't accept his absolute priority for this time of favor that it is rescuing individual people from the penalty of their sins by spreading the good news of the gospel and so we turn the church instead into a campaign against economic poverty or environmentalism or peace and justice or whatever it may be that we just can't accept that his plan and purpose does allow even the most faithful of his servants to suffer pain and suffer loss and suffer deprivation and so we want to turn the church into a prosperity movement that says that

Jesus' real priority now is universal healing for everyone and universal wealth for everyone not rescuing people from their sin by proclaiming the gospel to them maybe that we can't accept that repentance and really following Jesus now means that I must deny myself and take up my cross and follow him his way perhaps denying my own sense of self perhaps as my sexual identity expressed the way I want it to be submitting to Christ's call to chaste and godly self denial and I don't want that so I pretend that my Jesus is really a very different Jesus who will dance to my tune and let me live life the way I want to live friends the message of this passage is that the real Jesus won't dance to your tune or mine and he says to us just as he said to that generation what about you what do you make of

John's message and my message a message of unavoidable repentance and a message of unearned grace and still today we see exactly the same effect as it's always had and we see so clearly in verses 29 and 30 the great divide the great divide that is always provoked by the real message of the real wonders of salvation in Jesus it's a division isn't it at the level of the heart either rejoicing in the wonders of his grace or it's the irrational and perverse rejection of those who have disdained the Savior's mercy the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves though to those who to all the world looked rich towards God full of knowledge full of privileged status but as Mary sang in her song the rich he has turned empty away of their own choice notice verse 30 it's very clear

Christ does not reject anyone who does not choose that rejection for themselves today this Absolutely those who hear the good news who humble themselves who know they're sinners who know they need grace they find that grace and the gift of repentance and so they justify God they rejoice in his righteousness in the gift of grace that leads to everlasting life. And God's wisdom, says verse 35, the true wonderful way of his salvation is justified, is proved true and revealed in her children, in all of those who do respond to his ways on his terms. So let me ask you this morning, friends, who is calling the tune in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. There will be many perplexities, many disappointments in your Christian life, no doubt. And genuine doubts will arise at times.

[49 : 07] But don't let the fact that the real Jesus and his salvation is truly greater and wider and bigger than you can ever fathom or indeed control or contain. Don't let that allow genuine doubts to turn into grudging disdain and disbelief. Have faith. Trust him. Look at all the things that he has done already for you and for so many others. And know that you can trust him for everything else in all of your life. And he promises you will be blessed. You will be blessed if you're not offended by the real Lord Jesus Christ. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, amidst the many mysteries and the fog and the darkness of this world through which we have to walk, send forth your light and your truth, we pray.

pray afresh into our hearts that we may place our hand in yours without reserve and follow you in the way of your great and marvelous salvation. Help us. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.